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Guidelines for Food Service at Churches and Social Functions

When a club, group or organization is planning an activity which involves a meal, the following guidelines should be considered during the planning stages and at the time the meal is to be served.

If possible, a person knowledgeable or familiar with food service should be designated to coordinate and supervise the food service activity.

During food preparations food handlers should:

1. Practice a high degree of personal hygiene and cleanliness, washing hands frequently during periods of food preparation.
2. All food handlers must wear hair restraints: hats, nets, visors.
3. Keep on hand an accurate food product thermometer to maintain the safe temperatures of all foods: cold at 41 degrees F or less and hot at 140 degrees F or higher.
4. All ready to eat food must be protected from contamination and should never be handled with bare hands. Use utensils, non-latex gloves or deli tissue.
5. Food display and service should be planned and arranged so that potentially hazardous foods (PHF – those that require refrigeration) are served within two (2) hours of preparation or less.
6. Rapidly cool all foods that are to be served cold to an internal temperature of below 41 degrees. Ingredients to be used in cold food preparation should be chilled before use.
7. Do not allow meat, poultry, turkey dressings, or stuffing to remain at temperatures between 41 degrees and 140 degrees. Never stuff poultry the night before cooking and never partially cook a stuffed bird.
8. Do not use butting boards, countertops, etc. that have been used for raw meats or chicken for preparing other foods without first sanitizing with bleach and water (mix ½ cap bleach to 1 gallon water). Store raw foods on bottom shelving of refrigeration units.
9. Avoid cross contamination of foods. Never mix raw foods with cooked foods. Under no circumstances should any used portions of foods be reused or reserved.

Leftovers

Leftovers should be kept to a minimum by good food management and serving practices.

Upon completion of the function all leftover foods that have been open for service must be discarded

Once served, portions of food should not be re-used or re-served, except that packaged foods, other than a potentially hazardous food (PHF) that is still soundly packaged may be re-served such as crackers.

When a self service format is employed, the re-use of soiled tableware by guests is to be prohibited. If single service tableware is to be used it should be discarded after each use.

All foods to be served at a function must be properly protected before serving. When it becomes apparent that there will be unserved portions of food that will become leftovers, they should be cooled quickly and refrigerated promptly after being properly covered. Prompt use of these leftovers should be planned.

Once a food categorized as an unserved leftover has been removed from storage for serving, it cannot be returned to storage for further use. If not eaten, it must be discarded. Unserved leftovers should never be returned to caterers for their future use unless of course it is a packaged non-potentially hazardous food within its sound original container.

Bake Sales

Bake sales are not currently required to have prior Board of Health approval or a permit. They could, however, represent a health concern.

When conducting a Bake Sale the Board of Health recommends:

1. That the sponsor maintains a list of contributors to their bake sales.
2. The listing should include the name, address, telephone number of the contributor and the type of food donated. A list of ingredients used in preparing the food and the date item was prepared should be included and kept with the item for sale as well, since many consumers have food allergies.
3. The transportation of food to the bake sale is important. Food should be wrapped or sealed. The vehicle(s) used to transport food should also be clean and maintained in good sanitary condition. Foods should not be transported along with family pets.

Organizational Meetings

Churches and social organizations occasionally have meetings where the membership brings food to be consumed during or after the meeting. If potentially hazardous foods are included, consideration should be given to food source, types of foods and the need to provide refrigeration. As long as the food is consumed only by membership and/or invited guests, no Food Permit is needed for the event.

Catered Functions

A common method of providing food at transient functions and gatherings, etc. is through the use of a caterer.

Each caterer is required by law to register with the local Board of Health; preferably 48 hours prior to the event.

Before hiring any caterer you should insure that the catering establishment is inspected, approved and licensed by the Board of Health in the town where the caterer is based.

The Buffet

When serving a meal buffet style common sense and good food handling practices should prevail. Keeping in mind the rule “hot foods hot – cold foods cold”. Food items should be served in shallow containers replenishing them frequently. Keep cold food iced (food should never be in direct contact with ice) or refrigerated. For hot foods, use of hot trays is recommended to keep foods hot. Candle type warmers are generally ineffective producing insufficient heat to retard bacterial growth. Keep hot foods covered as much as possible. Be sure hot and cold food has its own serving utensil. Sterno type heaters should be used subject to safety considerations. All foods should be kept covered except during the time when consumers are moving through the line. Ice used for drinks is considered a consumable and must also be kept covered and handled only with tongs or other appropriate utensil. Never use glass as a scoop since it could break or the fingers holding the glass could come in contact with the ice.

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